U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History

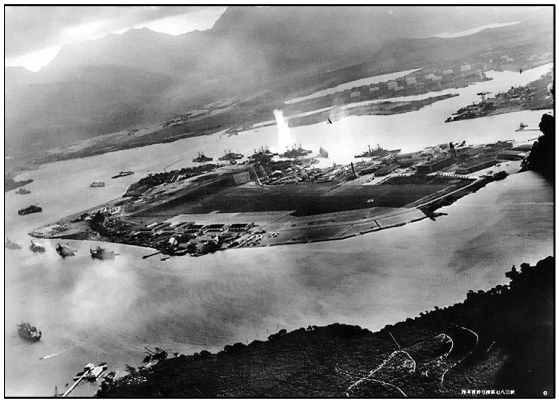
26 Sep – 2 Oct 2011

PACIFIC AIR FORCES

Countdown to 7 December 1941.

In late September, 1941, Commander Mitsuo Fuchida was selected to lead the air attack on Pearl Harbor. Fuchida was a Japanese Naval Academy classmate of Commander Minoru Genda, the officer planning the attack. "Fuchida had a very strong fighting spirit – his best quality," said Genda. "The success of the Pearl Harbor attack depended on the character and ability of its flight leader, and that is why Fuchida was selected for the job."

Fuchida, Genda and other officers began to refine the plan for the Hawaiian Operation. There were many difficult challenges, such as bombing tactics.



Torpedo bombing: Pearl Harbor is only 40 feet deep. The torpedoes would have to be modified to avoid hitting bottom, and released at very low altitude and a shallow angle. The bombers would be easy targets for American gunners if surprise was not achieved. Moreover, "Battleship Row" was only 500 meters from Pearl Harbor's eastern shore. The bombers would have to clear the eastern shore obstacles before diving down to release their weapons.

Fuchida had doubts about torpedo bombing since the U.S. ships could be protected with anti-torpedo nets. Also, the Americans were known to berth their battleships side by side, so only the outboard vessel could be targeted.

Dive bombing: This tactic had fewer problems than torpedo bombing and better accuracy than "horizontal" bombing (higher altitude releases from level flight), but the dive bombers were exposed to anti-aircraft fire and their bombs were not heavy enough to penetrate battleship armor.

Horizontal bombing: This tactic was the least accurate, a problem compounded by clouds or smoke. Also, even the larger weapons of the horizontal bombers might not get through the ships' deck armor. Genda thought these bombers should stay above 5,000 meters to avoid anti-aircraft fire and increase the bombs' chances to penetrate the American decks. Fuchida argued that 3,000 meters would increase accuracy and still achieve enough weapon velocity to penetrate the deck armor.

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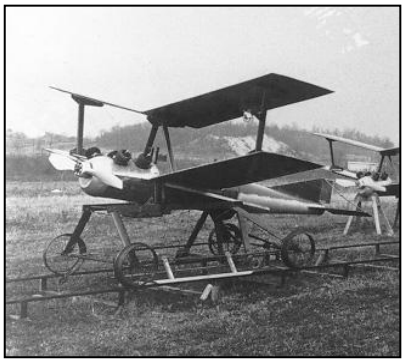
29 September 1918 **MEDAL OF HONOR.** Frank Luke enlisted in the Army during World War I. After flight training, his specific mission was to destroy observation balloons. Luke earned the nickname "the Arizona balloon buster" after destroying 14 enemy balloons and airplanes in 17 days of combat. On 29 September, Luke fought through eight enemy fighter escorts to shoot down three more balloons. Severely wounded, Luke dropped close to the ground and fired on German ground forces before crash landing. Once on the ground, Luke drew a pistol and fired at enemy soldiers until he died. At the time of his death, Frank Luke was 21 years old and the leading ace among U.S. pilots. He received the Medal of Honor posthumously. Luke Field on Ford Island and Luke AFB in Arizona were named in his honor.

"*Man, how that kid could fly! No one, mind you, no one, had the sheer contemptuous courage that boy possessed. I know he's been criticized for being such a lone-hander, but, good Lord, he won us priceless victories by those very tactics. He was an excellent pilot and probably the best flying marksman on the Western Front. We had any number of expert pilots and there was no shortage of good shots, but the perfect combination, like the perfect specimen of anything in the world, was scarce. Frank Luke was the perfect combination.*" - Harold Hartney, Commander, 1st Pursuit Group

"*He was the most daring aviator and greatest fighter pilot of the entire war. His life is one of the brightest glories of our Air Service. He went on a rampage and shot down fourteen enemy aircraft, including ten balloons, in eight days. No other ace - Britain's Bishop from Canada, France's Fonck or even the dreaded Richthofen - had ever come close to that.*"
- Eddie Rickenbacker



2 October 1918 The **first successful unmanned air vehicle/ cruise missile** was flight-tested at Dayton, Ohio. Developed by inventor Charles Kettering and Orville Wright, the Kettering Aerial Torpedo, or "Kettering Bug," was a small bi-plane with a 180-pound bomb, launched from a dolly running on a portable track. World War I ended before the weapon could be employed in combat.

29 September 1938 Maj. Gen. Henry H. Arnold became **chief of the Army Air Corps**, replacing Maj. Gen. Oscar Westover, who died in an airplane crash on September 21st.

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30 September 1940 **Hickam's "Big Barracks,"** also known as "**Hale Makai,**" was completed. The world's largest single military barracks at the time, it could house 3,200 personnel and feed them in shifts in the central mess hall. The building is now home to Headquarters PACAF.

27 September 1943 For the first time, **P–47s escorted B-17s all the way to their targets** in Germany. The P–47s flew over 600 miles by carrying additional fuel tanks.

26 September 1945 The Army's Corporal missile, the **first research rocket and the first liquid-propellant rocket**, completed its first development flight at the White Sands Proving Grounds. The rocket rose to 43.5 miles, about twice the expected altitude. The technology led to further programs such as Aerobee research rockets, Viking rockets and Titan ICBMs.

27 September 1951 **In Operation PELICAN,** a **C–124 Globemaster II** flew for the first time from Japan to Korea, delivering 30,000 pounds of aircraft parts to Kimpo Airfield and demonstrating the potential of very large transport aircraft in a combat theater.

1-14 October 1952 **Operation FOX PETER TWO.** A flight of 75 F-84Gs flew across the Pacific through the use of extended air refueling. The operation proved that fighters could be moved forward quickly in the U.S. Pacific Command AOR.

28 September 1954 The **YF-101A Voodoo first flew** at Edwards AFB. The heaviest, fastest single-seat U.S. fighter of this period, the "one-oh-wonder" had roles as a bomber escort, nuclear fighter-bomber, and air-defense interceptor and was the first fighter used for supersonic photo reconnaissance. The F-101 also had a large role in the development of its replacement – the F-4 Phantom.

27 September 1956 **MACH 3**. Capt. Milburn G. Apt, USAF, became the first pilot to fly at three times the speed of sound, but the flight ended in tragedy. Capt. Apt flew a Bell X–2 rocket-plane dropped from a bomber launched at Edwards AFB. (At left, Capt Apt is in the X-2 cockpit.)

Military jet designs had smaller wings and tails to reduce drag. No one knew that the higher speeds and lower stability of these designs would cause **inertia coupling** – a phenomenon in which control inputs on the wings met resistance from fuselage inertia, throwing the aircraft into extremely violent, uncontrolled motion.

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Capt. Apt was an experienced test pilot but he was new to the x-craft program. On this flight, Capt. Apt ran low on fuel and turned back towards Edwards while still above Mach 3. The X-2 tumbled out of control, and Capt. Apt was unable to free himself from the escape capsule before impact. The lessons learned from Capt. Apt's flight and other tests led to improved airframe designs, stability augmentation systems and other improvements to high-performance aircraft.

1 October 1957 General Thomas S. Power, the CINCSAC, initiated **ground alert** operations to counter the Soviet ICBM threat. SAC kept a third of its aircraft ready for takeoff with weapons loaded. It was under General Power that SAC adopted the slogan ***"Peace Is Our Profession."***

2 October 1981 **"Rearming America."** President Reagan announced that the U.S. would build and deploy 100 B-1 bombers. (On 1 October 86, the B-1 achieved initial operating capability at Dyess AFB, Texas.) President Reagan also cancelled the multiple-shelter ICBM basing scheme for the M-X missile in favor of super-hard silos, and announced programs to continue the air-launched cruise missile (ALCM) program and to develop an advanced stealth bomber.

27 September 1991 President George H. W. Bush ordered termination of SAC alert, initiated in October 1957, during which crews had stood ready around the clock to launch nuclear strikes. This event heralded the **end of the Cold War** between the United States and the Soviet Union.

1 October 1999 The USAF deployed Aerospace Expeditionary Force 1 (AEF 1) to Southwest Asia. It was the **first AEF to deploy** under a new rotational system for 10 AEFs. The new system allowed the Air Force to respond more effectively with ready forces for operations overseas and increased morale by making deployments more predictable.

27 September 2001 SECDEF Donald Rumsfeld announced that President George W. Bush had given certain military commanders the **authority to destroy hijacked civilian airliners**.

29 September 2001 The **U.S. launched satellites from Alaska** for the first time, using the Kodiak Launch Complex. Previous U.S. space launches were only from Florida or California.

2 October 2006 ACC declared an initial operating capability for the GBU-39B **Small Diameter Bomb**, a low cost and low collateral damage 250-pound precision strike weapon for use by fighters, bombers and UAVs. Three days later, the 494th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron used the GBU-39/B in combat for the first time when F-15E Strike Eagles carried the weapon on a close-air support mission in Iraq.

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